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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

State Agencies Team Up to Combat America's Supersized Killer

*Obesity Expected to Claim Over 500,000 Lives This Year,
Becoming Nation's No. 1 Cause of Avoidable Deaths*

Salt Lake City (June 5, 2004) — According to a recent study released by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, obesity is expected to become the leading cause of avoidable deaths within the next year, surpassing a death toll of 500,000. Walking is one form of exercise known to reduce many of the health risks accompanying obesity, with:

- 50 percent less incidence of Diabetes
- 30 to 40 percent reduction in the risk of heart disease
- 50 percent reduction in the risk of premature death
- 20 percent reduction in the risk of stroke

Utah Governor Olene Walker, the Utah Department of Health (UDOH) and Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) have teamed up to combat the obesity epidemic with today's "Walk on the Wild Side" at Utah's Hogle Zoo. The collaborating agencies have organized the mile walk to raise awareness and appreciation of walking for better health among Utahns.

"Our state agencies are working together to proactively improve the health of our citizens and our quality of life," said Gov. Olene Walker. "The key begins with awareness, and hopefully today we'll encourage people to take action."

"Many people enjoy walking because it is low impact and does not restrict you to certain times or places," said Joan Ware, director of the Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention Program for UDOH. "One can take several short walks throughout the day and hugely benefit."

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Today's event also celebrates National Trails Day, and will include commemorating the designation of a Gold Medal Mile (GMM) Trail within the Zoo. The Gold Medal Mile initiative urges Utah communities to adopt their own GMM Trails. Those agencies responsible for today's activities hope to encourage individuals to utilize the abundance of trail systems available within Utah for exercise.

"America is realizing it can no longer afford to 'supersize it' and forgo exercise," said Jane Lambert, MS, exercise physiology and community health specialist for the Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention Program at UDOH. "To avoid premature death linked to obesity, it is paramount our lifestyles include physical exercise and healthy eating. Today's event brings us one step closer to overcoming the obesity epidemic."

Families, adults and children alike are expected to take part in the event. Governor Walker, Ware and UDOT Deputy Director Carlos Braceras will address the benefits and importance of exercise. Participants will then enjoy a walk along trails winding between animal exhibits and other Zoo attractions.

"The Utah Department of Transportation promotes the safety and wellness of Utah citizens," said Braceras. "We at UDOT encourage walking and the use of trails within the state as an opportunity to prevent obesity and to reduce vehicle emissions and the risks associated with them."

For more information on walking in Utah, visit www.utahwalks.org.

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